

Remarks

The various parts of the Office Action (and other matters, if any) are discussed below under appropriate headings.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 112

Claims 21 and 29 have been amended so as to render moot the rejection under 35 USC 112. Claim 21 now uses the transitional phrase "wherein" and claim 29 has been amended by changing "involving" to "comprising". The other amendments are to improve the clarity of the claims and none of the amendments is intended to be further limiting.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

The claims have been rejected as being unpatentable over US 6,373,936 (Raniere) in view of US 6,625,258 (Ram). The rejection should be withdrawn for at least the following reasons.

The present application discloses schemes that allow a user to initiate communications with one or more predefined groups in a simple manner. This is achieved by associating a specified service address (e.g. a short code telephone number) with a defined group of people. The user can send a text message to all members of the group by simply sending a conventional text message to the service address, and can initiate a conference call among the members of the group by placing a conventional voice call to the specified telephone address. Thus, applicant discloses simplified schemes for allowing a user to establish group communications where the communications can be text messages sent all members of a group or the initiation of voice conference calls among members of the group.

In contrast, Raniere describes a scheme for allowing parties to an existing voice conference call to share data, e.g., image files, without interrupting the ongoing conference call (see column 1, lines 12 to 14 and column 1, lines 34 to 46). This is achieved by local storing of data on each participant's computer prior to the call and providing a lead speaker with the ability to coordinate the display of this data on the participants' computers during the call (column 1, lines 47 to 58).

Because Raniere's scheme relates to sharing data in an ongoing conference call, it has nothing to do with initiating conference calls and much less in the manner set forth in the claims. Furthermore, Raniere has nothing whatsoever to do with schemes for sending text messages to predefined groups of users.

Accordingly, and contrary to what is stated in the Office Action, Raniere does not disclose or suggest many of the features of claim 21.

For example, Raniere does not disclose "*the apparatus being configured to store for a first user addresses representing members of at least one group of users, said addresses being configurable by the first user*", as recited in claim 21. The office action says this is disclosed in Raniere at column 4, line 51 to column 5, line 20, but this is plainly not the case. This part of Raniere merely gives examples of the kind of data objects that might be shared during an on-going conference call. The data objects include, for example, image and video files in various formats, spreadsheets, and word processing documents that may be shared during the voice conference call.

Raniere also does not disclose "*wherein the first user may send a text message to a service address corresponding to one of the at least one group of users*". Raniere has not been found to have anything to do with text messaging, let alone schemes for replicating a text message to a group of users. There appears to be totally lacking any reasonable basis for the Examiner's contention that the phrase "multiple users enter voice modes" at column 5, line 19 of Raniere meets the claim feature.

The Examiner is correct that Raniere does not disclose "*the apparatus being thereby operable to replicate the text message to the members of that group of users and wherein the first user may make a voice call to the same service address, the apparatus being thereby operable to initiate an audio conference with the members of that group of users*", as recited in claim 21. The Examiner, however, contends that claim 21 is obvious from Raniere in view of Ram. This simply is not the case.

Ram describes a scheme for facilitating communications across different networks (column 1, lines 8 to 14). In particular, Ram is directed to providing users with access to services such as voice calling, email and facsimile services provided by different service providers. This is achieved using a virtual assistant system (VAS) (see paragraph bridging columns 2 and 3).

Ram notes one possible service that might be available is conferencing calling (column 3, line 12). This, however, is simply given as one example in a list of services typically provided by telephone companies (see column 3, lines 14 to 15). Ram is not concerned with, and does not consider in any way, how such calls may be set up. As with Raniere, there is lacking any hint or suggestion of setting up a conference call by a user placing a voice call to a service address associated with a predefined group of users.

Furthermore, and as with Raniere, Ram has not been found to have any relation to text messaging. As with Raniere, Ram neither hints at or suggests replicating a text message to a predefined group of users in response to a user simply sending a text message to a service address associated the predefined group.

The Examiner does refer to column 9, lines 3 to 5 of Ram, where the word "replication" is used. Column 9, lines 3 to 5, however, relates to the storage of information/data, and simply notes that data replication services may be provided. This is a normal function of data repositories, and has no apparent relevance to sending messages.

For at least the foregoing reasons, claim 21 is patentable over Raniere and Ram, whether taken alone or in combination. Similar comments apply to method claim 29.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, request is made for timely issuance of a notice of allowance.

Respectfully submitted,

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